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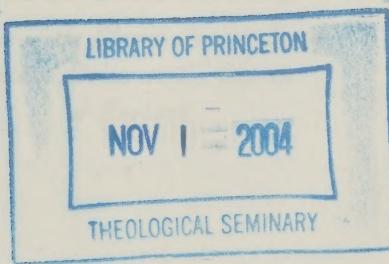


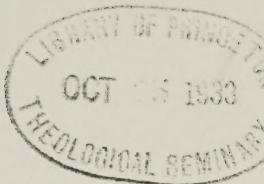
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THE REVIVAL OF CHRISTIANITY
THROUGH THE POWER OF PREACHING

THE WORK OF A NATIONAL
CATHEDRAL





THE REVIVAL OF CHRISTIANITY THROUGH THE POWER OF PREACHING

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NATIONAL CATHEDRAL



by MONELL SAYRE
Trustee of the Church Pension Fund
Pension Advisor to the Church
of England

WASHINGTON, D. C.

1924

*"The following paper represents the view of
a man of practical affairs and large business
experience. The Chapter of Washington Ca-
thedral has adopted the central idea and is
preparing to put it into immediate execution."*

JAMES E. FREEMAN,
Bishop of Washington

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*The substance of remarks made
before the chapter of the Wash-
ington Cathedral at its meeting
on October ninth, 1923*

by MONELL SAYRE



CHRISTIANITY has lost its hold on the masses of the people. The industrial classes have ceased to be influenced by it. It has shrunk into a concern of the so-called middle and upper classes. This is a condition which, if allowed to continue, means that Christianity in America will soon enter definitely into the status of a decaying religion.

A religion is really alive only so long as it is the religion of the people. Whenever the workers in factories and mines and shops turn from a religion it begins to be of the past. True always, this is emphatically true of the twentieth century. That these workers have ceased to be interested in the Christian Faith is the testimony of all competent observers. Even the allegiance of the so-called higher classes is shaken, especially among those who may

*A Crisis in
Religion*

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be loosely designated as the intelligentsia. Christianity is caught in one of the decisive crises in its centuries of struggle; it must summon all of its statesmanship to maintain itself as the world religion.

The Christian Church must not allow itself to be deceived by apparent material prosperity. A certain type of church leader always evades real problems by referring to imposing statistics—the roll of adherents, the number of church edifices, enormous subscriptions for routine purposes and for building and other special projects. History shows that nothing can be more illusory than such official complacency. Probably the last Abbot of Glastonbury, when he took his seat in the House of Lords, thought that the most certain of facts was that the sixty abbots save one who were his predecessors would be duly followed by other sixty in the succeeding generations. Yet, within twenty years, he saw the enormous fabric of English monasticism swept completely from the face of the earth. The Church of France, in the seventeenth century, refused to accept the most moderate taxation on ecclesiastical property; before 1800 there was no Church of France and no ecclesiastical property to be taxed. The absolute blindness of the Church in Russia our own eyes have seen.

The only strength of a religion is its hold on the spiritual nature of the average man. There is no such hold by Christianity in America today. That multitudes still throng the churches, that rich men still make great gifts, of themselves prove nothing against the accumulating evidence of a decisive drift of the population as a whole the other way. Habit always counts for much, and the very day before Constantine overthrew Paganism, the priests of Neptune were cheered by crowds around his altars, and Roman Senators made great offerings in the temple of Castor and

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Pollux. If the artisan workers of America believed in Christ, the Church need not mind any meagreness of statistics. With those workers estranged, imposing columns of membership and wealth prove nothing—they are snares for unpenetrating leadership. The workers do not regard the Christ. Therefore His religion is in grave danger of ceasing to be a factor in America's life.

This danger of the practical overthrow of Christianity is the product of many causes, operating through many years. The revolution in man's conception of the universe and of its evolution, with the inability of much Christian leadership to adapt itself to this revolution; insistence that some favorite theory is essential to a following of Christ; emphasis on the relatively unimportant instead of on Christ Himself; emphasis on the material side of conduct instead of on an elevation of our spiritual strength; the prevalent belief that the Church is an instrument of the employer class working against the interest of those who live on wages; the inability of the Church today to exhibit and maintain those high standards of Christian morality of which it is the guardian and trustee. These are causes of the weakened influence of Christianity with which we are all familiar. But what we fail to realize is that a mere administrative defect within the Church has been a contributing element of no mean proportions.

This may seem to assign an absurd importance to administration, but not if we consider in what the administrative defect consists. In its work among men, the Christian religion has two duties. One duty is to shepherd the souls once gathered within the fold, or born within its definite influence. The other duty is to attract the souls whom the Spirit of Christ has not yet touched. The duties are quite different. They require quite a different species of

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organization. If both duties are handled with statesman-like insight, the Christian Faith is not only safe, the influence of Christ advances towards the universal recognition He demands as His right. If either duty is imperfectly conceived and organized, the Christian community approaches toward one of the crises which affright us today. For we have definitely allowed one side of the Church's organization to atrophy; and have cast upon the other side not only the performance of the duty it was initiated to fulfill but the duty it is constitutionally unable to perform.

The Work of the Parish Church

The only instrumentality of Christianity seriously and effectively at work today is the parish church. I speak here not only of the Episcopal Church, but, I think, of all Protestant Churches. The parish church and its pastor are admirably adapted to shepherd souls. No instrumentality can supersede it in that indispensable function. But to cast upon the parish church, as we have done, the other indispensable half of religion, that of attracting the multitude without, is to affront both worldly sense and Christian experience. It is not adapted to that task, it does not and it can not possess the instrumentalities. The work is practically left undone, and therefore we are confronted, other causes contributing, with a constantly shrinking Christian constituency.

Its Limitations

This casting upon the parish church of all of the duties of Christianity, both those it can and those it can not do, is again the result of a network of historical causes, of long continuance. A major factor probably is that habit of mind which arose when every individual in the community was, at least nominally, an obedient member of the Church and therefore the Church was externally completely triumphant. This medieval conception of the whole population as under the Church's sway continues to produce many

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disastrous consequences, as witness the light-heartedness with which the Church engages in internecine struggles, and its leaders in perpetual partisan conflicts. What might be safe in days of peace is essayed in the present perilous state of war—the officers dispute and whole brigades fire on each other in the very presence of the enemy. Reliance upon the parish church both to win, as well as to strengthen those once won, probably goes back to the time when, at least externally, there were no more souls in Western Europe to be won. Therefore, the Church concentrated her strength on preserving her own, and allowed her instrumentalities of offensive warfare to dwindle. But how different is the situation today, when in pain and humiliation we find ourselves an outnumbered and outmaneuvered army, slowly retreating toward defeat.

What then may wisely be said in any council of war meeting under such unfavorable strategic conditions? Surely this. That the Church has been in such crises before. That many times in her long experience she has faced complete disaster by the practical repudiation of the Christian Faith by whole populations. That in such grave emergencies, her statesmen have realized that her organization for offensive warfare to attract the souls of men had become impaired, and have set themselves, with the earnestness and soberness of statesmen, to refurnish it anew, and that the Church has then always been successful. That is, there is one method, which in the days of utmost disaster, if the Church uses with intensity and intelligence, always changes history, and transforms a Christian rout into Christ's great victory. It has always been so. It can be so today. This method of assured victory, stated in its simplest terms, is a Revival of Preaching.

Not a revival of preaching in the parish church. That is

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indeed good, and will doubtless necessarily accompany a wider preaching. But it is idle for the Church to sit in her parish churches and expect the alienated working class of America to flow in, so that they may then be won. They will not come. Their backs are turned definitely and of purpose. They have decided that the Church and the religion she presents is not for them. The parish church must be set free to strengthen those that remain and to receive those whom the wider preaching will gain. The revival of preaching must be planned solely to reach those who cannot otherwise be won.

Preaching to the People

The Revival of Preaching can not be held amid the Church's atmosphere. At the Washington Cathedral recently, at an open-air service, the preaching was heard by forty thousand men and women. No such auditory has ever listened to the Gospel of Christ on the American Continent. This service must rank with such historic assemblages as when Peter the Hermit is said to have aroused one hundred thousand listeners in the First Crusade. It is an illustration of what awaits the Church, when the Church puts forth Christ's strength. It is an augury most cheerful. But even that means the people coming in some measure to the Church. They will not. The Church must go to them.

This is the essence of the Revival of Preaching—the Church carrying the message to the people where they are. That is what has turned defeat into victory. It can do so again. The Christ is as winning to a twentieth century American workman as to the man of any age, if the American workman can be made to hear. The only place where he can be made to hear is where he is. There the Church must go. To continue to sit still and expect the workman to seek out the Church, is for the Church practically to

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turn her back upon her highest duty and desert her Christ.

The Revival of Preaching must carry to the American working man a gospel of the Christ and of the Christ alone. Christianity would not be the world religion, if in the centuries it had not developed a body of doctrine, a philosophy, law, administration, ritual. I am not deprecating these. But we do not teach the child to talk by beginning with the niceties of grammar. So to the soul which has lost the immortal vision, we shall be content, we know that we must be content, and content gladly, simply and solely to bring him in contact with the Divine Lord. That, in all the ages, has been enough.

But to present Christ and nothing else requires high intelligence and it requires training. Nothing tests the intellect like discriminating between the essential and the relatively unimportant. Here is where the inferior man always fails. Even the superior man, although the mark of his superiority is an inherent sense of what is essential, often needs expert guidance in order to discriminate with precision. The Revival of Preaching, therefore, can only be committed to those who are the great preachers of the Faith.

And they must be great preachers of the Faith in an especial sense. To sway vast multitudes is a gift of very few. If the current of America's spiritual life is to be turned about, however, vast multitudes must be touched by the voice of the prophet. The Church must send out those of her great men who, by the grace of God, possess those rare qualities of person and voice and emotion combined with intellect which will enable them, in a huge concourse of the indifferent, so to exhibit the personality of our Saviour that again there will be seen the spectacle of thousands being awed and melted at one time into an acceptance of the

*The
Gospel*

*A Task for
Great
Preachers*

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soul's Lord. We must find those rare preachers, and when we find them, we must so present Christ's need of them that there can be no question but that they will come.

A Message for the Age

Such preachers must carry a twentieth century message. It was so in all of the great Revivals of Preaching which have saved the Faith in past times. The preaching was adapted to the men of the day in which it was spoken; it was delivered with all of the knowledge open to the men to whom it was addressed. So it must be done by us. We cannot afford to present the Gospel except with all of the resources of the latest scholarship. The individual working-man can not be a scholar, but we deceive ourselves if we think that he is not well advised. He will know if we are ignorant or lacking frankness. Therefore, the preachers of the coming Revival must be free of the world of scholarship. Not necessarily original scholars themselves, they must have mastered the questions in debate, and be consummately able to handle them. In a world which demands that its leaders be abreast of the most recent learning, the Church must dwell not only in the past but in the present time.

Similarly the Christian Faith must be presented so as to take hold on the imagination of to-day. That Truth has many facets, some peculiarly adapted to one age, and others to the ages that follow. We need not fear that Christ and the central spiritual facts will not have an equal appeal in every time. But each generation has its own idiosyncrasy; it is Christian statesmanship to seize on that aspect of the Gospel which presents to it the strongest appeal.

Using all Appliances

The Revival of Preaching to save Christianity among twentieth century men is to be launched in a twentieth century world. It will therefore use all of that world's appropriate appliances. In a more simple day a multitude of

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unlettered preachers could be sent forth into the alleys of the medieval cities and could change the course of history. But we live amid two mighty instruments of power, publicity and organization. To neglect to use them, is to give to Christ only a half-hearted support. The preachers of the new Revival will advance therefore on society making use of all of the resources of modern publicity to get a hearing for Christ and all of the resources of modern organization to render most effective the results of that hearing.

The Christian Church anticipated the modern world in stressing and perfecting organization—organization transfused with a spiritual idea. A Revival of Preaching projected with the determination to turn about the current of spiritual life in America and make it again set toward Christ must be organized with the Church's best traditions of statesmanship. At the head, in immediate charge, under the general supervision of the Bishop of Washington of course, must be the nearest approach our day affords to a St. Francis, an Ignatius Loyola, or a John Wesley. As colleagues and associates he should have a group of men fired with the spirit of evangelism, gifted with the power of speech, and trained in all the arts of persuasion. Theirs is to be no temporary duty, but a permanent service, and if therefore such men are found engaged in parochial duties they may be withdrawn to this task, not for a brief period, but with the expectation that they will devote their lives to the preaching mission, going whither they are sent and where the best results may be expected to be won for the Church.

To the National Cathedral they will return frequently to recruit their strength from the tremendous physical and spiritual drafts made by a speaker who moves great audiences. At the Cathedral they will find teachers capable of

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adding new fire to their zeal and seeing that on each occasion they shall go forth equipped with every usance of a modern controversialist.

At the Cathedral also will be centered the organization which will see that the meetings they address are so arranged as to contain the men to whom it is necessary again to carry the story of Christ; and which will follow up the success of the preacher by those practical steps which will ensure that his success will not have been in vain. The Cathedral, besides enlisting the great preachers of our Church, and, we may confidently hope, of other Churches, will contain within its walls a school for training those young preachers turned out by the seminaries who give promise of the preaching ability which our age has so largely lost. We shall take adequate steps that the Church shall be no longer negligent of the duty and privilege of developing their gifts and using them for the great work of rescue.

The True Work of a National Cathedral

To the call of a faltering Christianity for such a rescue the National Cathedral at Washington answers as its peculiar duty. This is the function of a National Cathedral. In the days when Europe was being converted to the Christian Faith what happened in England and elsewhere was that the Bishop went first, and planting his little cathedral in the midst of a barbarous population, set out to civilize. As he did so, the parish churches grew up gradually, both that the converts might continue as Christians, and to be a home for the uninterrupted flow of the new answerers to Christ's call.

We have allowed a mighty population to sink back into an ignorance of Christ. Therefore our Revival of Preaching must be national in scope. To be successful in such a crisis, the Revival must use twentieth century methods,

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and these methods for such a purpose are necessarily too elaborate to be less than national. The National Cathedral at Washington realizes that to respond to such a duty lay in the minds of its founders, as their inspiration, and to that duty of organizing, equipping and sending forth into the midst of the people a band of mighty preachers of the Christ it dedicates itself as its part in the life of the Episcopal Church.

The National Cathedral does not plan any proselyting campaign for the selfish benefit of its own Communion. The renewed life which its own members will gain from the performance of a high duty is the only reward which the Episcopal Church seeks for itself in this venture of faith. The vision of the Christ has been obscured. To lift up anew before men's eyes that Divine Figure so as to permit its conquering persuasiveness to penetrate their hearts, is the Cathedral's sole aim. Each man so drawn and persuaded will then be free to express his Church membership and loyalty as his mind and conscience shall direct. It may well be that great preachers of other Communions will be ready to take their part in this endeavour, and that the National Cathedral on its side will have the privilege of including them among its messengers and prophets. The Cathedral believes that it can make so apparent the sincerity of the motive which is actuating it that gradually the whole force of American Christianity may be made effective for the saving of American civilization.

The peril to that civilization requires that this Revival of Preaching shall stress two problems which the other historic preachings have slurred. The first is the need to emphasize fundamental ethics. The former preachings believed so intensely that ethics without religion were feeble that they half forgot that religion without ethics is noth-

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ing worth. The religious teaching around us has rediscovered the importance of conduct, but it is too often the unimportant conduct, the minutiae of morals. The world needs preeminently to be recalled to Christ's own estimate of conduct, to those basic virtues which he told us were the summation of the character of God Himself—Justice, Mercy, and Truth. This Revival of Preaching must seek, not to make man accept any code of morals imposed upon him from without, but to give to man the inner spiritual force so that, basing his own character on the fundamental verities of Justice, Mercy, and Truth, each may work out a moral conduct which has reality because it is the reflection of his own spiritual life.

Defend the Basis of Society

Also it must combat the imminent danger which confronts not only the religion given to us by God but the structure of society so painfully built up through the ages by man. The individual basis of human society is ceaselessly and skillfully attacked; we carelessly allow the defense almost to go by default. No one wants the Church to defend abuses. No Church should allow itself to think of human organization as if it were a static order; the social life of mankind, like all things else, is a ceaseless evolution from the more imperfect to a less and less degree of imperfection which never will reach to the perfect itself. But here, as in personal morals, there are certain basic truths rooted in the inner spiritual nature of man. We should not allow these fundamental facts to be overturned by hasty tempers who, because society is necessarily always working in a state short of perfection, confuse that imperfection with moral obliquity. The Christian Church has always stood as a rock on the truth that man, and not the State, is the basis of the moral order, and that the individual man's inner nature requires the right to acquire

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and hold for himself in some measure his private property. Psychologically considered, the individual, deprived by force of the right to exercise his own control over things external, is not the well rounded being whom religion requires in order to bring to bear upon him her spiritual gifts.

To submerge the individual completely and establish the State as the sole authority; to accomplish this by depriving the individual of all capacity to call anything his own, is the aim of a world-wide political movement. In an atmosphere so charged, a great Revival of Preaching can not withhold its voice on the pretext that with things political it must not deal. For this is not only political, it is religious. It is an attack, not only on the individual basis of society, but on the inmost nature of the Christian Faith. It is fortunately an attack whose arguments can be exploded completely by intellect and wit. Nothing is so defensible, by those really competent, as the general state of organized human endeavor which has brought man from the thickets and caves to his present mastery of nature and of himself. Discriminating with the utmost precision between the fundamental and the things merely accessory, between abiding facts and the merely transitory, between principles and the abuse of them, guided always by the world's highest learning, the Revival of Preaching in the Twentieth Century must mobilize all Christian forces not only to rescue Christ's religion but also to protect organized society.

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